GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
PANCHAYATI RAJ
LOK SABHA

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SEVENTH ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE ON PANCHAYATI RAJ
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Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Seventh Round Table Conference on Panchayati Raj was held in Rajasthan in December 2004 to discuss all the aspects to strengthen the Panchayati Raj;

(b) if so, the outcome of the conference; and

(c) the follow-up action taken by the Government on the decision taken at the Conference?

Answer

MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR)

(a)&(b) The Seventh Round Table of Ministers in-charge of Panchayati Raj was held from 17-19 December, 2004 at Jaipur in which the subject of IT-enabled e- governance and capacity build -ing and training were discussed. A copy of the Recommendations made during the Seventh Round Table Conference is enclosed.

(c) The Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened seven Round Table meetings with State Ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj and evolved, by consensus, a set of around 150 points for action which have been put togetherin a compendium that was adopted unanimously at the conclusion of thelast Round Table in Jaipur. The Ministry has now initiated a process of visiting each of the States/ UTs to review with the authorities concerned the progress in implementing the points for action contained in the compendium. It is expected that this will accelerate the base of implementation of provisions of Part IX, read with Article 243ZD of the Constitution and bring about greater conformity, in both letter and spirit, to the Constitutional provisions of Panchayati Raj in all States/UTs concerned.

SEVENTH ROUND TABLE OF MINISTERS IN-CHARGE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ - JAIPUR, 17-19 DECEMBER, 2004

IT enabled e-Governance

1 . It is recognized that IT (Information Technology and Communication) is a vital input of capacity for Panchayats so that they can perform their constitutionally and legislatively mandated functions better.

2. IT ought to be primarily positioned as :

(i) a decision making support system for Panchayats themselves;

(ii) a tool for transparency, disclosure of information to citizens social audit;

(iii)a means for better and convergent delivery of services to citizens;

(iv) a means for improving internal management and efficiency of Panchayats;

(v) a means for Capacity building of representatives and officials of the Panchayats.

(vi) an e-Procurement medium

In this endeavour,the Round Table specifically proposes the following initiatives.

Process Re-engineering:

3. All States shall undertake a time-bound exercise of process re-engineering in consonance with the activity mapping already being undertaken by them for the functions transferred to the Panchayats,with a view to moving the processes of decision making, implementation, disclosure to the public, delivery of services and reporting and dissemination of information to Panchayat representatives to an IT enabled environment.

4 . In this exercise regard shall be had to avoid duplication of hardware and software initiatives by different State government departments and agencies.

5. Considering the functional domain of Panchayats that potentially extends to 29 subject listed in the Eleventh Schedule, all e-Governance initiatives at the local level have to converge with the appropriate PRI as the nodal point.

Data Ownership

6. Such re-engineered processes shall ensure that the ownership of the data collected at the Panchayatlevel is with that level in the first instance, as the system becomes sustainable when those who use the data feel that they own it.

7. While owning the data, the Panchayat could also operate, outsource or provide space to IT enabled multi service kiosk centers that provide IT enabled services to the people, including those that fall within the functions of the Panchayats.

8. The Community Service Centers being rolled out by the Ministry of Information Technology at the Centre may be located in the Panchayat offices so that panchayats services can also be delivered through these Common Services Centers (CSC).

Training:

9. There has to be a systematic approach on training of staff and Panchayati raj members through a cascading mode on use-of IT.

10. The opportunities offered by the satellite connectivity provided through the ISRO, including EDUSAT, can be used for undertaking training,

11. While developing training material,regard shall be had to design user friendly approaches that can facilitate training of the illiterate or the neo-literate.

Software:

12. Development of common software application packages with provision for appropriate customization by states is preferred. In this connection, the National Informatics Centre (NIC), which being a government body present in all districts of the country and which has already done considerable software development for Panchayats,may be considered as the primary software provider.

13. It is recommended that NIC strengthens themselves at all levels and-provide dedicated staff through creating a Panchayat informatics division, with a time bound mandate to develop e-Governance solutions to all levels of Panchayats. This will include the strengthening of the District Informatics Office of the NIC to support the District Planning Committee and the Panchayats.

14. The National Panchayat Portal developed by the NIC for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to become the information hub that links up Panchayats, the State Government and the Central Government for sharing of information, experiences and best practices. As a first step, all State governments may immediately link and port the content of their existing Panchayat Raj websites or portals to the National Panchayat Portal and all District, Intermediate and Village Panchayats can be enabled and facilitated to link up with the portal. The content can be regularly updated by the respective stake holders.

15. A repository of software solutions already developed by several states shall be msinLained by the Ministry of Panchayat Raj or an institution nominated by it, so that they can be used by other states.

16. Software development shall be primarily undertaken in open source software, with Indian language interphase, so as to reduce cost of replication and licencing.

Hardware:

17. States should consider specifying a framework for common standards for hardware and put in place a system for transparent procurement through competitive bidding.

18. Funds for acquisition of hardware could be dovetailed from various sources and could include.

(i) infrastructure funds available in multilaterally funded projects,

(ii) Own incomes of Panchayats,

(iii) Funds recommended by the Finance Commission for the creation and maintenance of Databases,

(iv) Funds sourced from a fund to be created and managed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj,

(v) MP and MLA Local Area Development funds

(vi) Purchases based on systems of annuity based purchases

19. Considering the present power situation in the country, while procuring hardware, special attention shall be paid to providing reliable and uninterrupted power supply to computer systems. Special emphasis shall be placed on renewable energy devices and systems that consume less energy.

Infrastructure and connectivity

20. It is recommended that the NIC expands its communication network,NICNET, to link all Panchayats at all levels by using State Wide Area Network funds provided by the Department of Information Technology, Government of India.

21. State governments can approach ISRO for providing satellite based connectivity in all the states to enable connectivity of all Panchayats. The initial infrastructure cost could be considered to be met or supported by an infrastructure fund that could be operated by the Ministry of Panchayat Raj.

Operationalisation of the plan

22. The initiative of empowering Panchayats with IT capacity shall be treated on par with creating national infrastructure such as power, telecom and roads.

23. Formulate a mission mode/empowered committee mode for IT enabled automation of panchayat institutions` with NIC and other solution providers, keeping in view the national e-governance action plan of the Government of India.

Capacity Building & Training

1. Training and communication ought to reach all PRI functionaries and elected representatives, namely,

(i) Gram Panchayat Members, Chairpersons and Office bearers,

(ii) Intermediate Panchayat Members, Chairpersons and Office bearers,

(iii) District Panchayat Members, Chairpersons and Office bearers,

(iv) All officials concerned at National, State, District, Intermediate & Village level; and

(v) Standing Committee members at all levels.

2. There should be special effort made towards sensitizing the media,political parties, representatives in the legislatures, civil society organisations and citizens,

3. There must be special campaigns for mobilization of Gram Sabha members,

4. There must be special training for women, SC/ST representatives as well as first time entrants into the panchayat system within 3 months of their entry.

5. Training for PESA areas should be designed so as to have regard to the cultural traditions and special needs of tribal people.

6. Training and communication should not be viewed as a single one-time intervention but should be a continuous, ongoing process leading to enhanced sense of self esteem and confidence. Training should cover both the `before` and `after` election periods. Initial training and communication should reach all elected representatives within one year.

7. For those Panchayat members who need it, a functional literacy training course should be undertaken immediately after their elections.

8. The panchayats should be encouraged to have a sense of ownership of the training programmes and play a major role in designing content and mechanisms of training. To this end, there must be representation for Panchayat members in the governing boards of training institutions that cater to their needs.

9. Content of training should press on strategic and technical aspects and should be based on a systematic Training Needs Analysis arrived at through multi-stakeholder consultative workshops, which would precede the design of training modules and materials.

10. There should be a minimum core curriculum that is common across the States adapting to suit local contexts. Core curriculum should include :

(i) Vision on puma swaraj through Gram swaraj,

(ii) Principles of secularism, equality and human rights emanating from the Constitution of India;

(iii) Gender equity and social justice;

(iv) Status of human development,

(v) Poverty alleviation;

(vi) Participatory planning, implementation and monitoring;

(vii) Right to information and transparency; and

(viii) Social Audit,

(ix) Rules and regulations covering Panchayati raj

11. Overall perspective of training must reinforce issues of social equity, gender sensitivity and justice among all participants in the process of governance through Panchayati raj, including all levels of the bureaucracy.

12. Thematic curriculum should include:

(i) Human Resource Management,

(ii) Natural Resources Management,

(iii) Disaster Management,

(iv) Financial management, including own resource management and accounting,

(v) Sectoral approaches into providing basic human needs

13. Training strategy should be inclusive, participative and interactive and a composite mix of various interventions:

(i) race-to-face participatory training;

(ii) exposure visits;

(iii) peer training/learning;

(iv) satellite training; and

(v) radio/cassettes/ films.

(vi) Traditional means of communication,

(vii) Newsletters, updates and digests of replies to Frequently Asked Questions,

(viii) Resource centers and Help Desks for Panchayats

14. Training content and processes should be relevant to the ground reality of elected representatives. It should continue to develop and evolve based on feedback and impact assessment. Training should become a two way process so that feedback can help in reforming the content and process of training, as also result in systemic changes in panchayat and government functioning.

15. States should move towards formation of training networks and collectives to share experiences, learn from each other, and access material from each other. States should also institutionalize collaboration with Community based organisations at the State, District, and Block level.

16. Training should inspire elected representatives to form federations or collectives and facilitate them to voice their demands for genuine devolution and development.

17. Trained members should be encouraged to become resource persons for further training of panchayat representatives Peer to peer learning, both within and outside the state through regional or national tie ups should be encouraged and supported

18. Training should include exposure to best practices through visits to other Panchayats.

19. All open universities may tie up with LGNOU and build linkages with the SIRDs and other like institutions engaged in training and capacity building

20. Training programmes shall be designed especially for the secretarial and technical staff working with Panchayats through institutions such as IGNOU. Such training programmes should lead to formal certification on achieving prescribed standards of learning.

21. Education in democracy and the constitutional role of panchayats as institutions of local self-government should be made part of school curricula

22. It shall be the endeavour of the central government to provide in as short a time as possible a panchayat capacity building fund through the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, which could include a certain percentage of central transfers specially earmarked for that purpose. Similarly, state governments should also create a Panchayat Capacity Building Fund for periodic training.

23. There should a national perspective plan on decentralized training and capacity building for all PRI functionaries with specific objectives timeframe and resources.

24. States can benefit by the use of pedagogy and training techniques with information accessible to all. The Ministry of Panchayati

Raj could develop a repository of training programmes, including training resources and manuals developed by the Commonwealth. Development of master modules in training in issues of gender, poverty, mass communication etc. could also be developed.

25. Independent training impact assessment studies should be periodically undertaken to assess the outcomes of training and inform emerging needs for follow up,

26. States shall work towards upgradation of training centers, such as SIRDs, and extension training centers at the district,block level and below.

27. With respect to the training needs of Panchayat members from the Union territories and States with Sixth Schedule areas,the Government of India would identify an SIRD or a group of institutions that could undertake the training.